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PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

REMARKS

OF

HON. ELISHA D. CULLEN, ✓

OF DELAWARE, 2510


IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, AUGUST 4, 1856,

ON

THE NEXT PRESIDENCY.

THE HOUSE BEING IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON THE STATE OF THE UNION.

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PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. CULLEN said: I find in a newspaper called the Savannah Republican of July 29, 1856, a paper published in Savannah, Georgia, what purports to be a speech of the gentleman from Georgia, [Mr. Cobb,] made to a portion of his constituents on the occasion of a recent visit to his home. Among other things in that speech I find the following, to which I especially wish to call the attention of that gentleman:

“Mr. Cobb pretended to discuss the claims of the several candidates for the Presidency and their respective prospects of success; how well he succeeded I will endeavor to enable you to gather from a synopsis of his speech, so far as I can relate from memory.

After a few general remarks by way of introduction, he charged upon the American party the *folly* of thinking to elect Mr. Fillmore by throwing that election into the House; for, said he, the record stands thus: it requires sixteen States to elect; Mr. Fremont has thirteen of the northern and western States, without a doubt; Illinois and Iowa, by some recent action in Congress, have demonstrated where they stand—this gives Mr. Fremont fifteen States; he wants but one to elect him, and that one he has in Delaware, who has but one Representative in Congress, and he has never failed to vote with the Black Republicans in every trying issue, and in fact it was his vote placed Banks in the Speaker's chair.

“Allowing, said he, for argument sake, that Mr. Fillmore gets four southern States, what will that avail without strong backing at the North? But he will not get a single northern State. Mr. Buchanan, he continued, will obtain the strength of the southern vote, though by no means sufficient to elect him; and then quickly vaulting to the back of that old Democratic hobby, the speaker urged the American party, if they would not see an Abolitionist-President, to drop Mr. Fillmore, and unite with them in electing Mr. Buchanan by the voice of the people.”

I ask the gentleman from Georgia whether those words, or the substance of them, were uttered by him upon the occasion referred to?

Mr. COBB, of Georgia. I have never been in the habit of noticing these accounts given in political papers of any speeches I make either here or before the people in public assemblies. I never have, during the time I have served as a member of Congress, asked the privilege of making a personal explanation, and I never shall in all proba-

bility. These reports of our speeches are imperfect, and incorrect often, even when made here by competent reporters; but when made by those who profess—as this correspondent does—to give the substance of speeches from memory, it not unfrequently happens, both with your political friends and your political opponents, that they misunderstand, and sometimes misrepresent, what you have said.

Now, in order that I may place this matter right before the gentleman from Delaware, and before the country, it is proper that I should state—not repeat the argument I then made—but that I should state the point which I was urging before the people in the address I delivered, when I recently visited my home. The position which I took before the people there was this: that it was dangerous to the interests and rights of our section of the country to throw the election of President into the House of Representatives; that in my judgment the result of bringing the election into the House of Representatives would be the election of Fremont. I based that opinion upon this calculation: it required sixteen States to elect; thirteen States were represented by a majority of Mr. Fremont's friends upon this floor. I did not state that Illinois and Iowa had, by recent action of the House, exhibited where they stood; and I allude to this as one evidence that this reporter did not understand the argument which I was offering. But I stated that, by the recent action of the House, on the day before I left for my home, Mr. Allen, of Illinois, had been turned out of his seat; that if his seat was filled by a Republican, and if a Republican was elected from the district represented by Mr. Trumbull—which district had given him two or three thousand majority—it would give the State of Illinois to Fremont. That would give him fourteen States. I stated that the State of Iowa was represented by a Democrat and a Republican; that Mr. HALL had been elected a year previous to the assembling of this Congress, and that, as I was informed, since the present session of Congress, Mr. HALL's seat had been contested, and would

not probably be acted upon during the present session of Congress, but would go over until the next session of Congress, when the presidential election was over; and if Mr. Hall, by the same majority which turned out Mr. Allen, was turned out of his seat, the vote of Iowa would be given to Frémont also, which would give him fifteen States; that that result would place the presidential election in the House in the hands and in the power of the gentleman from Delaware, and that I was unwilling to trust that power there. I therefore called upon the people of my State not to give a vote by which the presidential election would be thrown into the House of Representatives, and would be dependent upon the vote of the gentleman from Delaware. I did not state that the gentleman from Delaware had voted with the Black Republicans upon all these questions and issues, which is the point to which he takes exception, and to which he would very properly and justly take exception if I had so stated.

I commented upon two votes given by the gentleman from Delaware. One was on the Speaker's election. I urged, with warmth and earnestness before the people of that neighborhood, that at a time when the whole South, without reference to divisions of party, felt that their rights, and their interests, and their safety, were to be placed in jeopardy by the organization of this House being given into the hands of a political party, purely sectional in its character, and based upon hostility to the rights and interests of the South—that when the South with one united voice (with two solitary exceptions) cast their votes for a Democrat, although not the candidate of the Democratic party by caucus nomination, the gentleman from Delaware had resisted all the appeals made to him by his friends, that he had resisted the appeals which the South, by her interest in that election, made to him; he, rather than give his support to a Democrat—rather than vote for Mr. Aiken, had thrown away his vote, and allowed the present Speaker of this House to be elected as the representative of the same party which is now urging the claims of Mr. Frémont for the Presidency. On that I based the argument and appeal which I made to my people, that, in my judgment, the gentleman from Delaware—if he election came into the House of Representatives—could, under no circumstances, be induced to give his vote to Mr. Buchanan. I endeavored to show the people that Mr. Fillmore never would be elected before the people; that before the House he stood no chance of election; that the issue was between Buchanan and Frémont; and that the gentleman from Delaware, by his vote in the Speakership election, had given evidence, satisfactory and conclusive to my own mind, that whatever danger might imperil the South from the success of Mr. Frémont, that same danger, in my judgment, had imperiled our interests in the success of Mr. Banks as Speaker; that the gentleman from Delaware had resisted the appeals in one case, and would resist them in the other. I believe the gentleman from Delaware will not now say that he would not. I would not do him injustice; but I declare it is my fixed conviction, that he would not, under any circumstances, give his vote to Mr. Buchanan.

The other vote to which I alluded as having

been given by the gentleman from Delaware is not referred to by that correspondent. But, sir, as I have discovered since my return that I did him injustice in the reference to that other vote, although his attention has not been called to it by that article, I feel it due to him and to myself that I should now refer to it, in order that, when these remarks reach the people whom I addressed on that occasion, any impression made by these previous remarks may be removed. I refer to another trying and exciting issue, in which the people of the South felt so deep and keen an interest—the one growing out of the motion to expel Mr. Brooks; and I stated that the gentleman from Delaware had voted for the expulsion of Mr. Brooks. I made that statement because the gentleman from Delaware had, on the investigation of this matter, risen and stated to the House that he had changed his opinion on the subject, and he made a very able defense and argument on behalf of Mr. EDMUNDSON. I concluded that he intended to vote for the other resolution against Mr. Brooks and Mr. KEITT. The remark was frequently made, that only one gentleman from the South had voted for that resolution; and the impression was made on my mind, as upon the minds of others, that that vote was given by the gentleman from Delaware. But, as he has stated to me that I was not correct in that matter, I desire to correct myself by saying that he did not vote at all on the resolutions as to the expulsion of Mr. Brooks, but voted for the resolution censuring Mr. KEITT, and voted against the resolution censuring Mr. EDMUNDSON.

I have given the points which I made in that speech; and, if it were proper, I would go through with the same argument here for the whole country as I made for the people of my own town on the subject. I will close by repeating the firm conviction of my judgment, that the people who desire the defeat of Mr. Frémont for the Presidency ought to see to it that the election does not come to the House of Representatives.

Mr. CULLEN. I am very much gratified at the statement made by the gentleman from Georgia, and at his admission that he had done me injustice in the remarks which he had made on the evening in question in Athens, in the State of Georgia. I must say, Mr. Chairman, in regard to that matter, that the honorable gentleman had no grounds on which he could infer that my vote would be for Frémont in the presidential election, in case it should come into the House of Representatives. He could draw no such conclusion from anything that I had previously said or done, as that I would vote for Mr. Frémont. Such a contingency, sir, never once entered my mind, until I saw that report of the gentleman's speech. Did I come here as a Democrat? No, sir, but against the will and vote of every Democrat in the State of Delaware, with the exception of some half dozen or dozen votes of my personal friends. Did they send me here to support Democracy? Did that large and respectable party, which is the predominant party in that State, send me here to support Democratic principles, when they knew that I had long since turned my back upon them, had abandoned them, had left them, and gone from them forever? No, sir; and even the very individuals—from among my personal friends—of the Democratic party who supported

me, if they had believed that I could ever betray the confidence reposed in me, and that I, holding myself up to the world as an American, could come here and lay aside Americanism and support Democracy, they, instead of supporting me, would have pointed at me the finger of scorn and contempt. No honorable man would ever support one who had held himself up to the world as one thing, and then—after confidence being reposed in him—had betrayed that confidence, had turned traitor to his professed principles, and had disgraced those who had elected him. I came here with no prejudice against individuals of the Democratic party, with no prejudice against individuals of the Republican party. I did not know what the views of the latter were. I knew nothing of the views of the American party, further than had been elicited in my own State, and at those meetings in which their proceedings had been made public, and which I read in the public prints. I supposed it to be a national party—that it was truly a national party. I joined it as a national party; I came here as a national man. I sat here ready to vote for any man who was a national man, without regard to his Democracy or Whiggery. I cared not what his antecedents were: if he were a true man; if he were a man who loved this Union; if he were a man who would support the Constitution—a man who loves his country, a man of right character and true principles, and competent for the station—whether Democratic or Whig, or whatever might have been his antecedents—he would have received my vote as against any other man whom I did not know to be national and attached to the Constitution of the country. And such were my feelings until the meeting of the seventy-four Democrats, so celebrated at the commencement of the present session, when they went into caucus, and passed one of the most offensive resolutions that possibly could have been devised, especially holding up the American party to scorn and contempt. I saw that resolution, and I felt from my heart that it was a libel upon us. I felt indignant that such an imputation should have been cast upon the party of which I was a member. I felt that the American party did not deserve it. But they did not stop there. A few days after, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. COBB] rose in his place in this House, and made a speech, in which he took great exceptions to some of the principles held by the American party. He said something about horrible oaths and obligations taken by the members of that party. Another gentleman—the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. JONES,] also made a speech, to which I felt that I had the right to take exceptions. The honorable gentleman from Alabama, from the Mobile district, [Mr. WALKER,] a member of the American party, made a proposition, pending the election of the Speaker of this House, to meet the Democratic party in caucus in this Hall to nominate a candidate, and that both the American and the Democratic parties should unite in electing him. To this proposition every member of the American party was willing to accede. How was that proposition met by the Democratic party in the House? “No,” said the gentleman from Pennsylvania, “we cannot receive you. If you come into caucus with us, you must come to us as Democrats.

We will receive you in no other way.” Sir, the words had scarcely passed from his lips before they went to my heart, and I resolved that I would never vote for the Democratic candidate for Speaker of this House. Sir, I know of no such distinctions in parties as this. Is one party so much above the other, so much more honorable, or more respectable, as to require the other to acknowledge its inferiority before it will be allowed to unite with them? I do not so understand it. I did not so understand gentlemen who were connected with the American party, that they would so degrade themselves, that they would take upon themselves degrading obligations, or would make disreputable acknowledgments for the sake of union with the Democratic party. Some time after this it was rumored about the House that the Americans were going to vote for the Democratic candidate for Speaker. I felt some concern, some uneasiness about it. I inquired of a number of gentlemen—Democrats—to know if this was so. Doubtless, they said, it was. I then went to gentlemen of the American party, and asked whether it were so, and “No” was the unanimous response. Well, sir, soon after I obtained the floor, and declared to the House that I would vote for no man for Speaker who had been in that Democratic caucus, and had voted for the resolutions adopted by that caucus, or for any one who approved of those resolutions, or of the remarks of the gentlemen from Georgia and Pennsylvania, to which I have referred. After the speech made by the gentleman from Georgia, and the speech made by the gentleman from Pennsylvania, I resolved, as before stated, that I would never vote for any man for Speaker of this House who had voted for these resolutions, or approved them. I held to that purpose to the end of the contest, and I looked upon it as one of the highest honors ever conferred upon me to meet the approving smiles of my constituents, when I returned home, saying to me, “Well done, good and faithful servant, you have acted out your principles; you have done what we would have had you do.” This was the response which I everywhere met with when I returned home. My constituents were rejoiced at the course I had taken. Yes, sir, and more than two thirds of the Democrats in my State, I have reason to believe, approved the course I had taken. They said, elected, as I had been, by Americans, I could not have done otherwise.

Where does the gentleman get the obligations which I was under to vote for Mr. AIKEN? Were those obligations legal, equitable, or moral? How did they arise? I deny that I was under any obligations to vote for any nominee or candidate of the Democratic party. I had the right to vote for whom I pleased; but it was my duty to vote for the nominee of my own party. I was satisfied with him. I supported the distinguished gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. FULLER,] and voted for him from first to last. I voted for him for a week or ten days before I even knew him by sight. He frequently passed me, and I did not know that he was the candidate for whom I was voting.

Now, sir, the honorable gentleman from Georgia says that the Representative from Delaware was the cause of the election of Mr. BANKS. Sir, I not only say that the Representative from

Delaware was not the cause, either directly or indirectly, of the election of Mr. BANKS, but I say that the Democratic party in this House were indirectly the cause of his election, and how? By the Constitution of the country a majority was required to elect. We were acting under the rule of that Constitution. Well, sir, after the plurality rule had been introduced and voted on time after time, I ask the gentleman from Georgia to look over the record, and he will find that in not one single instance did the Representative from Delaware vote for that rule. I state to that gentleman that I would have voted against that rule to this day. How, then, was Mr. BANKS elected? The American party voted against that rule. That rule was adopted by the votes of the Democratic and of the Republican parties, and not by the votes of the American party.

After the plurality rule had been adopted, was it not evident to all who was to be the Speaker? It was easy to see when the plurality rule was adopted what was going to be the result. But the plurality rule was adopted, and the balloting provided for under it were taken, and upon the last ballot, when Mr. BANKS was elected, the name of the Representative from Delaware, with five others, stands recorded for HENRY M. FULLER. I believed then that it was my duty to vote as I did. I believe it now.

But now, the honorable gentleman from Georgia says that he believes I would vote for Mr. Frémont. Well, sir, how did I vote in the contest for Speaker? I remained true and faithful to my party. I voted with them from first to last. Sir, my party have nominated Mr. Fillmore, of New York, as their candidate for the Presidency. I approve of the nomination. I give the nominee my support; and I will say to the gentleman from Georgia that I will vote for him if the election comes to this House; and I can join with the gentleman in saying that my hope is that the election may be settled by the people, and that it may not come to this House. But, if God, in his providence, so orders that it shall be brought here and decided by this House, I trust I shall do my duty then as I did it in the contest for the election of Speaker. I will vote for Mr. Fillmore on the first, on the second, on the third, and on the last ballot, and on every ballot. I will not look to contingencies to say whether I would vote for either Mr. Buchanan or Mr. Frémont. What connection is there between them and myself? I am not the partisan of either of them. I have no connection with either of them. They were not nominated by me, nor by my political party. I may have a feeling of preference between them, but it is my duty to make no choice. I take the course which I believe to be that of an honest man. The pathway of duty is the path of safety. It becomes an honest man to act well his part, to be faithful and true, and to leave all consequences to God, who can overrule them at his will and

pleasure. That is my determination. I intend to perform my duty. I will, if God spares my life and faculties, vote truly and faithfully for Millard Fillmore from first to last, if the election comes into this House; and I will not vote for Mr. Buchanan, or for Mr. Frémont. I have no choice between them. Here is a plain road for me to travel. Shall I go away from that road? Shall my way be tortuous and winding? Shall I raise up difficulties for the purpose of encountering them? No, sir; there are no difficulties in my path. My constituents are for Mr. Fillmore. All my party go for him in a mass. Some months ago, I thought otherwise. I gave up the State of Delaware as lost. Recent information, however, enables me to say that that old Commonwealth will go for Millard Fillmore.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I will ask by what kind of morality the honorable gentleman from Georgia will ask an American to abandon his candidate and resort to Mr. Buchanan? Would such a course be honorable? He says that Mr. Fillmore cannot be elected. He cannot be elected if nobody will vote for him. It is the duty of every man to vote right, remembering his duty, and not concern himself about others. I believe—my opinion may not be entitled to much weight—but I do as firmly believe as I do in my existence, that if the presidential election is settled in this House, the decision will, the House voting by States, be in favor of Mr. Fillmore. I do not profess to be a prophet, but I believe as I have said. It may be remarked that the wish is father to the thought. So it may be. But that will not excuse me, whether he can be elected or not, for the non-performance of my duty. It is my duty to vote for the nominee of my party. I have never, in word or deed, expressed anything to the contrary. But it is not my intention to make any declaration in regard to a preference between Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Frémont. I cannot conceive of a case in which I can be called on to decide between them. If the three presidential candidates are returned to this House, I cannot conceive of any case, supposing them all to be living, in which I shall be justified, as a man of honor, in abandoning my nominee and voting for another. I can foresee no such contingency. Until I do, I will make no choice as between Buchanan and Frémont. I leave that for others. I may have a preference, but that preference I shall not express. I shall not express it by my vote.

I have said all I wish to say on that subject, and matters connected with it. I hope my prospective vote may not again be made the subject of another speech. Whether it is or not, I will say that neither coaxing, nor bribery, nor threats, will move me from my course.

If God spares my life and faculties, I will unquestionably give my vote as I have indicated. I shall do my duty in that respect cheerfully and faithfully, leaving consequences to God.

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